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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CHINA-RUSSIA MILITARY
EXERCISE, U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

1. Summary: Amid extensive coverage August 27-29 on local politics and the aftermath of a riot by Thai laborers in Kaohsiung, major Chinese-language Taipei dailies also provided moderate amounts of reporting on U.S.-Taiwan relations and the China-Russia joint military drills. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, carried a news story on its page six August 27 that was topped with the headline: "Taiwan-U.S. military talks [i.e. the Monterey Talks] will be held in the wake of the Bush-Hu meeting." Both the "Liberty Times" and centrist "China Times" August 28 quoted TECRO Chief David Lee as saying the U.S. government would announce the appointment of a new AIT chairman right before President Chen Shui-bian transits San Francisco and Miami this September so that the new chairman could accompany Chen during his transits. Both newspapers also said former AIT Director Raymond Burghardt will be taking up the position. The "Liberty Times," in addition, quoted Lee as saying that U.S.-Taiwan relations have stabilized since he took office.

With regard to the China-Russia joint military exercises, the pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a news story on its page four August 29 with the headline: "Taiwan secretly dispatches military aircraft to monitor China-Russia military drills." The sub-headline added: "A C-130 military cargo plane departed from [Taichung's] Chingchuankang military base for Okinawa last week, landed in the U.S. military base and intercepted electronic intelligence. [Taiwan's] Air Force Headquarters declined to confirm [the report]."

2. In terms of editorials and commentary, a "China Times" editorial commented on the China-Russia military exercises and said the drills have indeed marked a new milestone in terms of confidence building between the two nations. Chinese Council for Advanced Policy Studies Secretary-General Andrew Yang noted in an op-ed piece in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" that the joint Sino-Russia military exercises are a concrete move for China and Russia to demonstrative their determination to protect their own interests. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post," however, said China's saber-rattling proves that it is a threat and shows that it is eager to project its power beyond its borders. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" strongly criticized Washington's decision to cancel the "Monterey Talks" with Taiwan; the newspaper later carried the news that the talks had merely been postponed. Finally, an editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," urged the DPP government to carefully reevaluate the triangular relationship between Taipei, Washington and Beijing. End summary.

1. China-Russia Military Exercise

A) "How Should Taiwan View the Joint Sino-Russia Military Exercise"

The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (8/29):

"Judged from the [current] situation, the joint Sino-Russia military exercises have indeed marked a new milestone in terms of the confidence building between the two nations. The mutual trust between China and Russia is closely related to the rapidly changing geopolitical strategy of the two countries, and the weirder and more changing their neighboring environment becomes, the more easily it will push the two sides under pressure to move toward closer cooperation. It is thus, without doubt, the biggest error in the strategic plan of the United States and Japan if China and Russia were pushed to an extreme. .

"Given the current development, it is difficult to tell or estimate to which extent the strategic partnership between China and Russia will develop. But if [we] reflect on the security alliance mechanism that the United States has been working eagerly to establish, [we will see that] it takes four or five decades for such a mechanism to develop into the state it is in now. As for the relations between China and Russia, the two nations did not divest their past grudges until a decade ago. What grounds [do we have] to believe that China and Russia will establish an equal mechanism in such a short period of time to counterbalance the U.S.-Japan security alliance? ."

B) "The Intent and Capabilities of China-Russia Joint Military Exercises"

Chinese Council for Advanced Policy Studies Secretary-General Andrew Yang noted in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation 570,000] (8/29):

". China and Russia have [clear] strategic and political intentions for spending so much effort and money on a joint military drill that appeared to be complicated and confusing to the outside world. Even though the two nations have stressed repeatedly that their military exercises are not aimed at any [particular] threat or third nation, their statements, in the eyes of experts, merely shows that the more they try to cover up their intentions, the better-known they will become. The greatest symbolic significance of the joint Sino-Russia military exercises is that the two nations are troubled and concerned about the current changes in the geopolitics of Asia; in particular, Russia [is concerned about] an expanded U.S. force deep in the backyard of Central Asia, and China is eying apprehensively the strengthened military alliance between Washington and Tokyo in Northeast Asia and the Taiwan Strait. The increasingly enhanced energy cooperation between China and Russia and the security challenges they both face have also tied the future development and fundamental interests of the two more closely together. Their joint military drills are a concrete move to demonstrative their determination to protect their own interests. ."

C) "Beijing's Saber-rattling"

An editorial of the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] wrote (8/27):

". But the show of force [by China and Russia] could be counterproductive. On the one hand, the United States would try to strengthen its military alliance with Japan to maintain its military dominance in this part of the world. On the other, Taiwan would be frightened enough to beef up its defense by buying more modern arms from the United States. It goes without saying that Beijing's relations with Washington would be adversely affected, just on the eve of an official visit to the United States by Chinese President Hu Jintao, who will meet with President George W. Bush on Sept. 7 in the White House. The least thing Beijing should do is to prove that it is a 'threat' to the world.

"But the saber-rattling gives fodder to China basher, in Washington and elsewhere, that mainland China is a threat, militarily and economically. It shows that the country is eager to project its power beyond its borders. ."

12. U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations

A) "US Opts for Cents and Insensibility"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (8/26):

"The news that Washington has canceled the highest level US-Taiwan defense talks that take place each year [in Monterey, California] is a reminder of the inability of the Bush administration to conduct sensible foreign policy, as well as brazen hypocrisy when it comes to questions of principle.

"When Washington abandons pragmatism and ideology in its diplomatic affairs, then what is left? Unfortunately, the answer seems to be 'damage control. .'

"The problem with such reactive diplomacy is that it is shortsighted and sends the wrong message to Washington's allies, as well as its enemies - or 'strategic competitors' as the politically correct call

them. .

"The tension between China and Taiwan is neither a minor trade dispute nor a diplomatic gaffe that can be papered over. A conflict could involve the world's largest economies - the US, China and Japan - in a direct confrontation over vital strategic interests.

"Yet the Bush administration once again demonstrates its lack of imagination as it sacrifices what is clearly in the US' interest - support for a democratic state on the periphery of its security frontier - just so that Bush can have a nice, quiet photo-op with a tyrant. .

"The White House is making a grave mistake allowing itself to be influenced by Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit next month. After all, the trip is an exercise in fluff, and the most substantial thing that is likely to come of it is hours of TV coverage of two men in suits sitting in chairs with half-smiles on their faces. .

"Before it decides to sacrifice necessary security preparations, the US would do well to remember that everything is achieved in East Asia came at the price of blood.

"The shattered husks of fighters and warships that litter the ocean floor from the Solomons to Okinawa - and rivers of blood from soldiers and civilians - mark the last time an ultra-nationalist, militant state have to be brought to heel in the region.

"Does anyone want to see that happen again?"

B) "U.S.-China Ties Face High Hurdles"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] commented in an editorial (8/29):

". The drive by the Bush administration, under the forceful leadership of Rice, to build a 'candid, constructive, and cooperative relationship' with the Chinese Communist Party-ruled PRC government have created huge challenge for Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party administration.

"In the light of this new trend, the DPP government should carefully reevaluate the triangular relationship between Taipei, Washington and Beijing and understand thoroughly how the new 'Asian team' of the Bush administration perceives China. .

"As far as Taiwan is concerned, the pressure is on the Chen administration to seriously design a grand strategy that combines elements of strengthening its relationship with Washington while at the same time, closely observing and flexibly responding to the U.S.-China rapprochement in a global context. ."

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